

Town&Country

Smart About Art

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ON THEIR FREQUENT visits to New York museums, producer Roger Wallace and his seven-year-old daughter are regularly escorted by art historian Judith Shupe Walsh, of Art Smart Adventures (212-595-4444; artsmart.com). Walsh brings the collections to life for father and daughter alike with relevant books, colorful art stickers and funny anecdotes about the artists.

Thanks to innovative family-focused art tours led both by private organizers such as Walsh and by the institutions themselves, the sight of beleaguered children being dragged around the museum by their equally put-upon parents seems as old as all those Greek and Formal portraits on display.

At their best, these programs create little art lovers while educating and stimulating the grown-up participants....“Studies have shown that children who go to museums with their families tend to be lifelong museumgoers,” says Julie Charles, the manager of docent programs at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, where tours are designed to stimulate conversations between parents and children by posing such questions as what role chance plays in the creative process. At the Art Institute of Chicago, children attend workshops in the Kraft Education Center about current shows or the permanent collection and then lead their parents through the galleries.

Children who have been exposed to such programs often teach their parents to look at art from a new perspective. When businessman Jon Kenton’s kids lay down on the floor at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (during their Art Smart Adventure) to get a different view of a Robert Rauschenberg piece, Kenton and his wife got down there with them. Now when was the last time you saw anyone—regardless of his or her age—prostrate in a museum who wasn’t merely the victim of art fatigue?

